

SUPERMARKETING FOR SENIORS

Shopping service provides more than groceries

By Silvia Foster-Frau

Angela Lyons, 84, started feeling aches and pains about 10 years ago. It started in her shoulders, spread to her knees and now, her back.

"I can walk, but standing is murder ... And I can't lift this arm up here," she said, lifting her arm up until it was almost to her ear, but not quite. She said she should get surgery on her knees, but she doesn't think it's worth it anymore.

The arthritis prevents her from doing seemingly simple activities, including using both hands to wash her hair, getting out of cars and going to the grocery store.

"And that's when Felice comes along," said Lyons.

Felice is Felice Robinov, 77, a volunteer for the Supermarketing for Seniors program offered by Jewish Family Services. She's been volunteering for three years.

"I just wanted some way to help ... I wanted to enlarge my circle of people I care about, people I love," said Robinov.

"I was nervous at first, I remember I didn't even know how to make a grocery list," said Lyons. "And then by dog, we got it."

Volunteers like Robinov help make grocery lists and go shopping for homebound seniors like Lyons. By providing this service, Greenwich residents 60 or older have a way to stay in their homes instead of moving to nursing homes out of necessity.

Like many of its clients,

the program, in its 29th year, is struggling to make ends meet. It has experienced significant drops in funding because of federal and state-wide cuts. In 2012, the program received \$75,000; last year, it received \$48,000. Lisa-Lorraine Smith, executive director of Jewish Family Services, said JFS remains committed to the program because it believes in the cause.

Robinov and Lyons said they're grateful because without the program, they never would have met each other.

In 1980, Lyons moved from London to the United States with only a suitcase to keep her company. What started as a two-week trip to take care of a friend's kids became the rest of her life. She was a nanny in the greater New York City area for more than 20 years.

Lyons never married and has no children of her own, although she has strong ties to the children for whom she was a nanny, getting calls and regular visits. Her apartment is filled with their gifts, from kitchen and living room appliances to the decorative wooden animals that line her window.

Lyons has a large stuffed chair that is "her chair" and two others beside it, one of which Robinov usually sits in.

Together, they assemble grocery lists, go shopping (Shop-Rite) and go out for lunch (Olive Branch Café). Sometimes they'll just sit in Lyons' apartment and chat.



Silvia Foster-Frau / Hearst Connecticut Media

Angela Lyons, 84, and Felice Robinov, 77, have become friends since they met through the Supermarketing for Seniors program of Jewish Family Services. The program sends volunteers to homebound seniors who need someone to go grocery shopping for them.

"We laugh a lot," chuckled Lyons, "but not at anything in particular."

They talk about everything, from the mundane — "The peaches are so mealy lately," said Robinov. "It's awful!" said Lyons, "but the plums are good." — to the deeply sensitive — "I've told her some of my darkest secrets," said Lyons quietly.

Smith, of Jewish Family Services said many of the shopper/shoppee partnerships get this close. Lyons said shopping with Robinov is good exercise for her and she gets more of a say in the food they buy.

Robinov was a dietitian for 25 years in New York City, so she tries to help Lyons eat the right foods, she said.

"Sometimes I say 'Ah, I'd love to have some chocolate cake,' and she rolls her eyes," said Lyons, who said she lost 15 pounds since Robinov came into her life.

Lyons said she would never think of Robinov as someone who just did shopping and nutrition for her.

"When you get older, you just want to have more human connections," said Robinov. "You're never too old to make friends, and that's such a wonderful thing."

"Yes and the older you get, the more important they are, because one of the worst things about being old is being alone," said Lyons.

She said sometimes, when she's talking to people, she loses the ability to talk.

"That's age," Robinov told her.

"You think that's age? ... I thought it was me being alone," said Lyons.

Robinov shook her head in disagreement and Lyons smiled.

"There are a lot of people who keep away from you when you get older, I don't know if they're scared. But the people who do come to you, they are precious, and they make such a difference in your life," said Lyons, looking at Robinov.

*SFoster-Frau@scni.com;
@SilviaElenaFF*